

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8594
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USSOUTHCOM

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 06169

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PN, PQ, US
SUBJECT: TROPIC TEST CENTER

REF: STATE 179020

1. THE EMBASSY HAS CONSULTED SOUTHCOM AND THE TROPIC TEST CENTER (TTC) ON THE ISSUES RAISED IN REFTTEL. WE SUGGEST A TARGET DATE OF 31 OCTOBER 78 FOR COMPLETION OF DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT. THIS TIME FRAME WOULD ALLOW TIME TO COMPLETE ENGINEERING STUDIES WHICH WILL DETERMINE DETAILED COST ESTIMATES FOR MOVING/ CONSTRUCTION. IT WOULD ALSO GIVE THE EMBASSY A CHANCE TO WORK WITH THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT ON OTHER QUESTIONS WHICH WE CONSIDER TO BE OF HIGHER PRIORITY, E.G., THE FAA AGREEMENT, THE PRISONER EXCHANGE TREATY, THE CEMETERIES AGREEMENT, ETC., DURING A PERIOD OF PERSONNEL SHORTAGE. BY OCTOBER WE EXPECT TO HAVE ON BOARD A TREATY IMPLEMENTATION TEAM WITH STAFF TO HANDLE THE VARIOUS PROBLEMS WHICH WILL BE FACING US.

2. AFTER CONSULTATION WITH TTC, WE HAVE DETERMINED THAT TTC REQUIREMENTS IN THE GAMBOA AREA SHOULD BE STATED AS 4200 ACRES (1700 HECTARES) BOUNDED BY THE PANAMA RAILROAD ON THE WEST, THE CANAL OPERATING AREA BOUNDARY ON THE
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SOUTH, PIPELINE ROAD ON THE EAST AND RIO FRIJOLITA ON THE NORTH. THESE BOUNDARIES HAVE THE ADVANTAGE GENERALLY OF BEING OBVIOUS AND REQUIRING LITTLE IF ANY SURVEYING, THOUGH, IF NECESSARY, IN THE COURSE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO PARE OFF SOME AREAS.

3. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER OR NOT TTC OBTAINS USE OF THE

AREA DESCRIBED IN THE PREVIOUS PARAGRAPH, IT HOPES TO MOVE A PART OF ITS OPERATION TO THE CERRO PELADO AREA. IF IT DOES NOT GET AGREEMENT TO USE THE 4200-ACRE AREA DESCRIBED ABOVE, TTC SEEKS TO MOVE THE GAMBOA OPERATIONS TO CERRO PELADO. SOUTHCOM NOTES THAT THE PORTION OF THE CERRO PELADO AREA DESIRED BY TTC FALLS WITHIN THE CANAL OPERATING AREA; THAT IS, AREA NOT TO BE RELEASED TO PANAMA. SOUTHCOM, THEREFORE, WOULD LIKE TO CONSIDER THIS AS AREA FALLING WITHIN THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE III OF THE AGREEMENT IN IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE III OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY, WHICH GIVES THE US THE RIGHT TO USE CANAL OPERATING AREAS FOR MILITARY TRAINING SO AS TO AVOID A FURTHER NEGOTIATION WITH PANAMA OVER A LAND AREA THAT IS NOT TO BE RELEASED TO THEM ANYHOW. SOUTHCOM AND THE EMBASSY WOULD LIKE TO GET THE DEPARTMENT'S INTERPRETATION ON SUCH A CONSIDERATION.

4. RE PARAGRAPH 5(B) OF REFTEL, WE BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD TRY TO OBTAIN USE RIGHTS FOR THE LIFE OF THE TREATY BUT SHOULD BE PREPARED TO FALL BACK TO A SHORTER TIME PERIOD, SUCH AS THE FIVE YEARS WITH A RENEWAL SUGGESTED IN REFTEL. AS FOR WHAT PAYMENTS WE MIGHT MAKE TO THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT (PARA 5(C)), WE BELIEVE THAT DOD SHOULD DETERMINE ITS BOTTOM LINE, AND ON THAT BASIS OUR NEGOTIATING POSITION COULD BE ESTABLISHED. IT WOULD BE USELESS FOR US TO TRY TO GUESS WHAT PANAMA MIGHT REQUEST. BUT WE DO BELIEVE THAT IF IT IS WILLING
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TO TALK SERIOUSLY ON THE QUESTION AT ALL, IT WILL WANT A QUID PRO QUO WHICH MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT BE MONETARY.

5. THIS MESSAGE SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED TO BE THE NEGOTIATION PLAN REQUESTED IN REFTEL. WE WILL SUBMIT THAT AT A LATER DATE.

6. COMMENT: WHILE IT IS CERTAINLY WORTHWHILE TO TRY TO GET A SUITABLE AREA IN GAMBOA FOR TTC'S OPERATIONS, WE ARE NOT VERY OPTIMISTIC. WE HAVE VERY LITTLE TO OFFER IN RETURN TO THE PANAMANIAN, IT WOULD APPEAR, AND THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT MAY WELL DECIDE THAT THE POLITICAL RISK OF, IN EFFECT, LEASING THE LAND TO THE US IS SUBSTANTIAL. WE DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT THE MAGNITUDE OF MONEY WHICH TTC MIGHT BE ABLE TO OFFER WOULD DO MUCH TO DULL THAT SENSITIVITY. JORDEN

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